Crime rate in Lahore higher than in Karachi: Altaf

By Our Staff Correspondent

LONDON, Jan 1: Muttahida Qaumi Movement chief Altaf Hussain has said the state operation in Karachi is part of prime minister Nawaz Sharif's "Punjabisation Policy", which is aimed at making the port city a colony of the centre.

The MQM chief made these observations in his telephonic address to the MQM MNAs, MPAs, senators and members of the coordination committee in Karachi and Islamabad on Thursday.

During his lengthy speech, Mr Altaf Hussain said the Establishment was pursuing a policy to create an image of Karachi as a "City of Crimes" and "Place of Terrorism".

He said the Establishment was using the official propaganda machinery to paint Karachi as a city plagued with terrorism and violence with a clear objective to create hatred for that city and its population.

He provided facts and figures to the members of his party to establish that violence and terrorism was more rampant in Punjab, where prime minister's brother Shahbaz Sharif is the chief minister as compared to Karachi.

Quoting from figures provided by the government in the Senate, Mr Hussain said 998 people were killed in Lahore in 1998 compared to 662 in Karachi. If the ratio of population between Karachi and Lahore is also taken into consideration, the graph of crime and murder in Lahore would almost double from Karachi, he said.

"On an average 83 murders are committed in Lahore every month, compared to 55 in Karachi."

Similarly, he said the law and order situation in the Punjab metropolis was far worse than in Karachi.

Quoting facts provided by Interior Minister Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain in the Senate, Altaf Hussain said according to him 1,070 people were killed/murdered in Lahore between January and September 1998 compared to 661 people killed/murdered in Karachi during the same period.

He said the figure of 1,070 people provided by the Interior Minister does not include 126 people who supposedly committed suicide in Punjab.

Similarly, he said, 26 bomb blasts occurred in Punjab during 1998 in which 48 people were killed and 267 people wounded. In comparison, 11 bomb blasts occurred in Sindh in which only nine people were killed. He said of 26 bomb blasts in Punjab, 12 occurred in Lahore and Gujranwala alone.

Altaf Hussain said the number of people killed in incidents of terrorism or sectarianism terrorism was also much more in Punjab where 79 people were killed and 43 injured in such incidents in 1998 as compared to 31 people killed and 29 injured in similar incidents in Karachi during the same period.

He said Punjab police also took lead in extra-judicial killings where 910 people were killed in 273 fake police encounters in 1997 and 197 people were killed in fake police encounters in 1998.

He said every incident in Karachi is painted as an act of terrorism whereas if a similar incident occurs in any other part of the country, it is termed as a "peoples' reaction".

Mr Altaf Hussain said the recent incidents in Bannu, where people attacked police stations and fired upon the law enforcement agencies were declared a "peoples' reaction" to the police excesses whereas if a similar incident happens in Karachi and people come out on streets to express their anger by attacking police or burning vehicles, the Establishment and the newspapers paint them as terrorists and newspaper headlines say law enforcement agencies came under terrorist attack.

He said the official media, particularly the state-run radio and television, depict Karachi as a terrorist city and its people as terrorists to justify the state operation against the Mohajirs.

"When the people of other provinces take law and order into their hands they are not termed terrorists but when the people of Karachi come out to protest killings of their sons and daughters, they are termed terrorists," he said.

"If the people come out in Lahore on streets, it is called people's reaction but if they come out in Karachi to protest over the killings of youths, these incidents are termed terrorism in newspapers."

Mr Hussain said the negative propaganda was a part of government's smear campaign against the MQM and a part of its three-pronged strategy to annihilate Mohajir community.